

SEARCHABLE TASK-BASED INTERFACE TO CONTROL PANEL FUNCTIONALITY

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0001] The present invention pertains to user access to means for adjusting settings and configuration alternatives associated with a computing device. More specifically, the present invention pertains to a task-based interface for adjusting settings and configuration alternatives.

[0002] Many software programs have a large number of options for adjusting settings and configuration alternatives, and commonly have a large and complicated user interface scheme for allowing a user to make such adjustments. One disadvantage associated with most of these user interfaces is that a user is forced to map from what he'd like to do (for example, "erase the log of what web pages I've visited") to the part of the user interface where the task can be accomplished (e.g., the Network and Internet category, Internet Options applet, General tab, Clear History button).

[0003] The control panel component associated with an operating system is a prime example of one environment in which the described challenges arise. There are hundreds of tasks that a user can accomplish with controls implemented through a typical control panel. In many cases, when a user opens the control panel, they are presented with a list of control panel applets and often, especially at first, do not know what they do. The applet names, descriptions, and icons give a general idea, but for the most part users must open an applet and "tinker with it" to discover its functionality.

[0004] In some cases, parties other than the original creators of the control panel are able to add functionality of their own, most often in the form of new applets. Typically, a customized extension of the core user interface system is accomplished through specialized code generated by a highly skilled application developer. There is a need for an extensible task framework for simplifying the process of making modifications and additions to a scheme for enabling the adjustment of settings and configuration alternatives.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0005] Embodiments of the present invention pertain to a computer-implemented method for enabling a user to efficiently navigate to a portion of a user interface configured to support performance of a particular task. The method includes receiving from the user an input that includes a description of the particular task. A result set is returned to the user and includes a plurality of candidate tasks that correspond to the description. The candidate tasks are displayed relative to an indication of at least one corresponding applet.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0006] **FIG. 1** is a block diagram of one computing environment in which the present invention may be implemented.

[0007] **FIG. 2** is an exemplary screenshot representing a control panel home view.

[0008] **FIGS. 3 and 4** are exemplary screenshots representing control panel applet views.

[0009] **FIG. 5** is an exemplary screenshot representing a task search results view.

[0010] **FIG. 6** is an exemplary screenshot representing a tool for facilitating creation of a task.

[0011] **FIG. 7** is a schematic diagram demonstrating a data management scheme.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF ILLUSTRATIVE EMBODIMENTS

I. Exemplary Environment

[0012] **FIG. 1** illustrates an example of a suitable computing system environment **100** within which embodiments of the present invention may be implemented. The computing system environment **100** is only one example of a suitable computing environment and is not intended to suggest any limitation as to the scope of use or functionality of the invention. Neither should the computing environment **100** be interpreted as having any dependency or requirement relating to any one or combination of components illustrated in the exemplary operating environment **100**.

[0013] The invention is operational with numerous other general purpose or special purpose computing system environments or configurations. Examples of well-known computing systems, environments, and/or configurations that may be suitable for use with the invention include, but are not limited to, personal computers, server computers, handheld or laptop devices, multiprocessor systems, microprocessor-based systems, set top boxes, programmable consumer electronics, network PCs, minicomputers, mainframe computers, telephony systems, distributed computing environments that include any of the above systems or devices, and the like.

[0014] The invention may be described in the general context of computer-executable instructions, such as program modules, being executed by a computer. Generally, program modules include routines, programs, objects, components, data structures, etc. that perform particular tasks or implement particular abstract data types. The invention may also be practiced in distributed computing environments where tasks are performed by remote processing devices that are linked through a communications network. In a distributed computing environment, program modules may be located in both local and remote computer storage media including memory storage devices.

[0015] With reference to **FIG. 1**, an exemplary system for implementing the invention includes a general-purpose computing device in the form of a computer **110**. Components of computer **110** may include, but are not limited to, a central processing unit **120**, a system memory **130**, and a system bus **121** that couples various system components including the system memory to the processing unit **120**.

[0016] The system bus **121** may be any of several types of bus structures including a memory bus or memory controller, a peripheral bus, and a local bus using any of a variety of bus architectures. By way of example, and not limitation, such architectures include Industry Standard Architecture (ISA) bus, Micro Channel Architecture (MCA) bus, Enhanced ISA (EISA) bus, Video Electronics Standards Association (VESA) local bus, and Peripheral Component Interconnect (PCI) bus also known as Mezzanine bus.